

VZCZCXRO5215
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0420/01 0491004
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 181004Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1761
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000420

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2019
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: MEK/CAMP ASHRAF UPDATE: MINISTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS
SEEKS TO BALANCE NSA PUSH FOR ACTION; MEK AIR GRIEVANCES

Classified By: Political Military Minister Counselor Michael H.
Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: As the Iraqi National Security Staff and some of the internal security forces agitate for rapid movement against the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) at Camp Ashraf, Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim has moved to a more prominent position on the GOI Ashraf Committee. She visited Camp Ashraf and met with residents February 1 and co-chaired a bilateral USG/GOI meeting regarding Camp Ashraf with National Security Advisor (NSA) Mowaffaq al-Rubaie February 5, during which the GOI considered (but did not set in motion) actions such as separating the leadership by force or moving the camp residents to other locations in Iraq. USG officials told the GOI and the MEK leaders that U.S. forces will complete the transfer of security authority of the camp on February 20 and move to a monitoring role. Two of the most prominent MEK grievances are the GOI's restrictions on family visits and logistics for the camp. SEPTTEL lays out the Embassy and MNF-I's strategy for dealing with the Camp Ashraf issue as the GOI considers its options. End Summary.

----- --
Minister of Human Rights Returns to Camp Ashraf

¶2. (C) Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim led the GOI Ashraf Committee to Camp Ashraf February 1 to meet with Camp Ashraf residents (CAR) to attempt to reach out to residents and reassure them of the GOI's position and offer opportunities for those who wished to leave. Salim was insistent on addressing "all" the residents at Ashraf, but the MEK leadership instead arranged a meeting at one of the female units with about 150 female residents in attendance. The group was emotional and Salim's message was drowned out by well-orchestrated but seemingly sincere outbursts - which included denunciations, insults, and demands. After leaving the hall in protest, Salim allowed herself to be convinced to return by some of the residents (who promised to let her speak) despite the apparent reluctance of her GOI colleagues. On her second attempt to address the residents, Salim was able to get her message across, although she was periodically interrupted by shouts and denunciations.

Rubaie Calls Joint Ashraf Committee Meeting

¶3. (S/NF) NSA Rubaie called a joint USG/GOI Ashraf Committee meeting February 5 in Baghdad. The primary purpose of the meeting was to review options for dealing with the Camp Ashraf situation. Representatives from the Ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Displacement and Migration, Human Rights, and Interior; as well from the Prime Minister's National Operation Center and the National Security Council (NSC); attended the meeting co-chaired by Rubaie and Salim.

Pol-Mil MinCouns and Commanding General (CG) Task Force 134 (TF-134) led a U.S. delegation. Rubaie reviewed the situation at Camp Ashraf and reviewed options for dealing with the Camp. He allowed the National Security Staff to present a number of requests for the USG and the CAR, notably requests for:

-- the USG to pass to the GOI all database information, including biometric data, and any other intelligence the U.S. side had on the MEK and its members. The U.S. side noted Qside had on the MEK and its members. The U.S. side noted that we had already provided a list of names and some general data on the residents of Ashraf to the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR), this was all the USG had but would determine if additional information could be found and shared.

-- the USG to provide identities of the 50-100 top leaders of the organization present at the camp. Rubaie noted that the GOI wanted to attempt to "separate" the top leaders from the rest of the population. The U.S. side noted that it only had information on representatives who had regularly met U.S. officials and could not categorically identify the "leaders" in the camp. When advised that attempting to remove the leaders from the camp would lead to a catastrophic reaction by the other camp members, Rubaie stated that perhaps a means could be found to physically isolate them from the rest of the camp residents.

-- the USG to provide information gained from the 2004-2005 USG interagency (FBI, DOS, CIA, DHS) investigation. (Note: The MEK often refer to this investigation as "proof" that they are not terrorists and that they should be de-listed from the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization listing. End

BAGHDAD 00000420 002 OF 003

note.)

-- the CAR to agree to the GOI conducting a "good-will" survey under the supervision of the MoHR. The survey, intended to determine identity and desire to repatriate voluntarily to Iran or another third-country and/or facilitate defections from the group. The survey was to start on February 7 and finish by March 7. Rubaie ordered the Ministries of Interior and Defense representatives to provide 10 trailers for the survey and temporary shelter for those that wish to defect. The first to be surveyed are "the 1015 residents with ties to third countries." (Note: As of February 18, trailers had not been delivered and the survey had not begun. End Note.)

-- the GOI to conduct a census of the camp. Rubaie said that the GOI plans to conduct a census under the supervision of the Ministries of Interior and Planning. Rubaie wanted the census to be conducted simultaneously with the survey, but Minister Salim said the survey would be conducted separately as she did not understand the purpose of the census and did not believe it conformed with humanitarian approaches to the camp. US reps advised Rubaie that such a census would have to be conducted sensitively in order to gain the cooperation of the residents (who had agreed only to the MOHR survey). International Organization monitoring might be a way to ensure a humanitarian approach. Rubaie suggested asking the ICRC to observe the process and said he would be in touch with ICRC to see if they would help.

-- the USG to provide communications equipment for the IA BN. Zainal Abbu, a representative from the NSC, noted that the IA BN at Camp Ashraf does not have sufficient communications equipment to communicate with Baghdad. The U.S. side said it would look into the request.

-- the GOI to conduct a search of the camp. Rubaie said that "intelligence" has indicated that the MEK might have buried weapons in the camp. He indicated his intention to search the camp, but acknowledged this would be a difficult task and deferred consideration of how to go about it.

-- the GOI to regulate family visits. Rubaie noted that in the past, the MEK leadership had been selective in regard to who is allowed to visit the camp residents. Minister Salim remarked that the current system put in place by the GOI, whereby all visitors must first report to the MoHR to check names, relationship, and legal status, was too cumbersome and needed to be simplified. Rubaie then said the IA BN at the camp could conduct the same checks. Rubaie said family visits would be restricted to first-relation relatives (parents, siblings, and children). Trailers would be set up near Grizzly Checkpoint (GCP) for the visits. Residents not wishing to receive visits from family members would have to sign statements to that effect and personally deliver them to their family members at the GCP. (Note: Following discussions with EmbOffs, the Minister Salim decided to deploy two MoHR representatives to Camp Ashraf to monitor and manage family visits. They had not arrived as of February 17. End Note)

-- a date for when the transfer to the IA would be completed. After an Iraqi police representative from Diyala at the meeting complained that he wasn't allowed to enter the camp when he wanted by TF-134 Military Police (MP) forces, Rubaie asked for the date when the transfer to full IA control would be complete. When told that date would be February 20, Rubaie said he would alert the Prime Minister. From that date, Rubaie told the group, "We are in control; we'll do whatever we want."

-- the GOI to develop proposals to disperse residents to other locations. Rubaie noted the camp was located near the Iranian border and questioned the ability of the IA forces to protect the camp after the U.S. forces withdraw. As such, he suggested the committee study the feasibility of transferring the residents to two or three other locations in the western part of the country and away from "Iranian rockets and mortars." He noted that the GOI does not have extra forces to protect the camp and that "99 percent of the residents are innocent."

Bilateral USG/MEK Meeting February 12

14. (S/NF) Embassy and MNF-I representatives visited Camp Ashraf February 12 to review MEK positions on the GOI

BAGHDAD 00000420 003 OF 003

approach. GOI representatives chose not to accompany the U.S. side for the visit, noting that the committee had just met in Baghdad. U.S. representatives pressed the MEK to learn to work with the GOI and noted the stressed that instead of calling the Embassy or MNF-I every time there is a problem, they must learn to reach out formally to the GOI. The U.S. side encouraged the MEK to write letters to committee members as well as to Prime Minister (PM) al-Maliki to explain each problem they are encountering as well as offering possible solutions, copying the U.S. Embassy. He stressed it will take time to build trust in their relationship with the GOI, as it did with the U.S. in 2003. (Note: Camp Ashraf leadership drafted a letter addressed to the PM airing their grievances February 15 and "family members" of residents drafted a letter to Minister Salim February 17. End Note.)

15. (S/NF) CG TF-134 informed MEK leadership that on February 20, U.S. Army MP forces at FOB Grizzly would transition into a monitoring role and turn control of the GCP over to the IA, with regular checks being made by the U.S. forces. At this announcement, only one of thirteen MEK leaders sitting at the table even flinched, and they admitted to having known about this change in advance. After hearing the details of the change, they moved on to other business.

¶16. (S/NF) MEK leadership presented two primary concerns at the meeting. The first was family visitation problems: the IA would not permit family members inside the camp. Visitors had to remain in a trailer at the entrance to the camp, which was complicated because of gender issues. The second issue was logistics: the IA and Iraqi Police (IP) are making it increasingly difficult for suppliers of the camp, specifically eight food vendors, to enter through road blocks. In the past, drivers would spend the night at the camp after a long drive, but the IA is no longer permitting this.

¶17. (S/NF) Progress was made on one issue - that of the survey of Ashraf residents by the MoHR. Madame Parsaie, Vice President and spokesperson of the MEK, quickly agreed to provide trailers so the process could begin. Minister Salim agreed February 14 to use trailers provided by the MEK, as long as they are swept for monitoring devices and are placed where she desires.

Comment

¶18. (S/NF) Some of the GOI Ashraf Committee members are pushing hard for more movement on Camp Ashraf. Minister Salim (despite an unfortunate reception at the hands of the residents) continues to press the Ashraf Committee to take a humanitarian responsible position on the camp. SEPTTEL provides joint Embassy/MNF-I thinking on the way ahead as GOI increasingly enforces its control over Camp Ashraf and the CAR look for ways to dramatize their situation.
BUTENIS